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ABSTRACT

Moral development is viewed as a matter of progression in the cognitive reasoning and rationale underlying choices and judgments. Traditionally, retrospective reports of rationales have been used to measure moral development levels, resulting in unreliable information. Information Integration Theory attempts to assess individual differences in social judgment reasoning by assigning scale values and weights to information. To investigate the effects of training on reasoning in moral choice following Information Integration Theory, 16 high school students (8 from a training course in moral decision making and 8 from a control group), evaluated eight moral dilemmas from Rest's Defining Issues Tests. On a 1-20 scale students indicated how strongly they felt the character in each dilemma should engage in the alternate target acts. An analysis of the results showed that those students completing moral decision training made more moralistic choices than the control group. The trained group were similar to controls in the use of rationales, but they showed less relativism in integrating those rationales. Formal moral education, instead of maturing the reasoning process, imparted a greater sense of moralism and led to a retrogression in the complexity of reasoning about the integration of decision elements. Future course content in moral education should focus on critical thinking and training in weighting and reasoning strategies, rather than the current practice of directly training moral values. (BL)

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Effect of Training on Reasoning in Moral Choice

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Moral reasoning was investigated by varying instructed likelihood of occurance of rationales prior to choice (rather than gathering retrospective reports of rationales). An information integration analysis separated reasoning from moral values. High Schoolers completing moral decision training made more moralistic choices, but were similar to controls in use of rationales, and showed less relativism in integrating rationales.

Paper presented at the meeting of the

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Moral development is traditionally viewed as a matter of progression in the cognitive reasoning underlying choices and judgments (Kohlberg, 1976; Piaget, 1965). One progression is in the complexity of reasoning about the components of the choice. People progress from an absolute consideration of components (moral realism or heteronomous reality), where any component is unchanging in its moralness and importance, to more relativistic reasoning (autonomous morality), where value and importance of components depend on the configuration of other components. A second progression, which is particularly relevant to the case where people are asked to choose between acts in moral dilemmas, is in the rationale most used for the choice. Preconventional rationales, which focus on the rewards or punishments for the person, give way to conventional rationales, which emphasize conformity to peer and societal expectations, which are followed, in turn, by postconventional considerations, which refer to abstract conceptions of justice.

Developmentalists contend that developmental level is indexed by reasoning employed in a choice, and not the values or outcomes (choices) of the reasoning. Reasoning levels are assessed by retrospective reports of rationales which were used in prior choices, given either in interviews (Kohlberg, 1976) or in paper-pencil, multiple-choice formats (Rest, 1975). There are problems with this strategy. First, retrospective reports of how one has formed a social judgment are unreliable (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). Subjects are unable to reconstruct their judgmental processes. Rather than asking Ss for the rationales which guided their choices, it is preferable (and common practice in social psychology) to observe the judgments made when different rationales are present or absent in a

situation, and infer weighting from the strength of choices under different conditions. Second, reasoning and the outcome of reasoning processes, i.e., the choices, are not clearly separated in developmental assessment techniques. Evidence shows a link between a particular choice (e.g., "Heinz should steal the drug") and the rationale selected (Martin, Shafto, & Vandeinse, 1977).

A clearer distinction between moralistic value and reasoning, both conceptually and operationally, is obtainable by application of Information Integration Theory (Anderson, 1982), which also permits the assessment of individual differences in social judgment reasoning (Kaplan, 1975). Each piece of information (e.g., a preconventional, conventional, or postconventional reason for an act) has a scale value, which refers to its value for the dimension of judgment (e.g., should steal the drug). Information that friends would approve of the theft would have a high scale value for that action. Information also has weight, or subjective importance for the judgment. Information about peer approval, for example, would have less weight for a person functioning at a post-conventional, than at a conventional level. The information is then integrated according to an algebraic rule, which could vary its complexity. For example, in constant-weight averaging, each piece of information retains the same absolute importance in any combination of remaining information, while in differential-weight averaging, weights are configural, and depend on the weights and values of other information. An example of the latter - - relativistic weighting - - might have the person taking postconventional ("principled") considerations into account if there is little chance of punishment, but less so if

punishment is certain. Reasoning in the model would refer to the weighting scheme adopted, i.e., how much weight is placed on each rationale, and the type of integration rule applied. Value would refer to the subjective "goodness-badness" of the information, and the moralness of the final judgment.

This study assesses reasoning by manipulating potential rationales prior to choice rather than by gathering post-hoc retrospections from a "shopping list". It applies a graphical and statistical integration analysis to separate reasoning (rationale importance and absolute/relative integration rules) from moral values. It applies this analysis to assessing a high school moral decision training program. These programs, which appear in many of our schools, in one form or another, have the common goal of advancing moral reasoning level through discussion of decision dilemmas, without tampering with underlying values and ultimate choices. Evaluation research is scanty, typically looking for changes in morality scores on Kohlberg's structured interview or on Rest's Defining-Issues Test. The present strategy seems better suited for discriminating between values and reasoning, without the circular relationship between choice and rationales, and the problem of relying on retrospection. Does training improve students' ability to maturely analyze moral situations, or does it inculcate particular values or products of reasoning?

METHOD

Moral Dilemma Scenarios

Eight moral dilemmas were obtained from the scenarios used in Rest's Defining Issues Test (Rest, 1975). In pretesting, it was determined that definite preferences existed for one over the other of the two alternative courses of action in each scenario, for example, college students preferred that Heinz steal the drug rather than let his wife die, or that the women should not report an escaped prisoner (see Kurtines and Grief, 1974; and Martin, Shafto, and Vandeinse, 1977 for similar suggestions of preference). On a 20 point scale, where "20" represented one choice and "one", the other, the degree of preference of one over the other ranged from 12.55-14.47 ($\bar{x}$ = 13.33). Preference tendencies were taken into account in construction of the final scenarios and in their presentation.

With the help of an educational consultant, scenarios were slightly revised to accommodate a 6th grade reading level. For each scenario,[1] eight modifications were devised, varying the likelihood that a preconventional, conventional, or postconventional outcome would ensue if one of the actions would be chosen. In any scenario, there was reported either a high or low chance that each type of outcome, or consideration, would take place. These considerations were worded so that in one-half the scenarios a high chance of occurance would argue for the less normatively preferred action, and

[1] Heinz and the drug, Webster and hiring, The strike, Doctor's dilemma, Student newspaper, Student takeover, Bingo game, Escaped prisoner.

in the remaining scenarios, a high chance would favor the more normatively preferred action. For example, "There is a high chance that authorities will discover who Thompson really is and Mrs. Jones would be prosecuted for withholding information" gives a high likelihood of a preconventional outcome favoring reporting the prisoner - - the less normatively preferred action. "There is a high chance that giving good on credit would teach others that the well-being of people is important for its own sake" illustrates a high likelihood of a postconventional outcome which favors the normatively preferred action of giving good on credit to strikers.

In this manner, each scenario was the basis for a 2x2x2 design of high and low likelihood of preconventional (Pr), conventional (Co), and postconventional (Po) considerations. Eight sets of booklets were arranged by a cyclical permutation procedure so that each booklet contained a complete design of the eight combinations of likelihoods of Pr, Co, and Po considerations, one combination to each scenario. Across the eight booklets, each basic scenario was ultimately paired with each consideration possibility. In short, combinations of Pr, Co., or Po likelihoods were balanced across the eight scenarios.

Subjects

Subjects were 128 freshmen in a small-town high school in Northeastern Illinois. Half the Ss were tested immediately after

completing a mandatory training course in moral decision-making, and half prior to the course. Sexes were equally distributed within the two groups. The course consisted of a one-week series of daily sessions in which decision-making in value-oriented life situations were discussed in class with the goal of having students think about the components and processes involved in important decisions. None of the experimental dilemmas were used in the course.

Procedure

Each booklet was evaluated by eight students each from the trained and control groups. Order of scenarios within each booklet was randomized. Students indicated how strongly they felt the character in each dilemma should engage in the alternate target acts on a 20 point scale ("Should not steal the drug (1)....should steal the drug (20)"). Care was taken to balance scale position of alternative (1 or 20) with affirmative/negative wording, and with normative preference (normatively preferred alternative on the left or right). By reversing the score of half the responses, higher scores reflected more moralistic preferences.

Results and Discussion

Figure one summarizes the results. Recall that higher scores reflect a rating more in the moralistic choice direction. Trained students differed from controls in two ways: They responded more strongly in the moralistic choice direction (higher scores in Figure 1), and showed less configuration in considering rationales (lack of

graphical interaction in the curves for controls). The greater moralism in Trained students is reflected in the main effect for training ($F(1,112) = 58.12$, $p < .001$). Considering the groups separately, trained Ss showed no significant interactions between pairs of considerations (note the parallel curves in all three panels), while controls showed all three possible interactions (Pr x Co $F(1,63) = 22.44$, $p < .001$; Pr x Po $F(1,63) = 14.04$, $p < .001$; Co x Po $F(1,63) = 6.99$, $p < .01$). Finally, there were no differences between the groups in the effect of any of the considerations, that is, interactions of groups with each of Pr, Co, and Po were not present.

In short, trained Ss were not more influenced by postconventional considerations, and were not less influenced by conventional considerations. However, they did more strongly choose the more moralistic action, and they were less configural in their reasoning processes.

Proponents of moral education generally maintain that moral values are not being modified, but that the process of attaining a a value-based decision is being trained. If process consists of the weighting of postconventional (relative to preconventional and conventional) rationales, we see that the reverse of moral education claims is being achieved. Training resulted in no greater use of postconventional rationales (nor a lesser reliance on conventional and preconventional), and led to a less relativistic integration of rationale components. Kids who were untouched by training showed the relativism in reasoning which Piaget attributed to autonomous morality, while trained kids evidenced a more absolutist reasoning (heteronomous

morality). In considering the importance of any one element, controls took into account the likelihood of other elements. For example (see left panel of Figure 1), preconventional rationales were unimportant if a conventional outcome is unlikely to occur, but become important (as shown by the relative slope of the curves) if a conventional outcome is certain. Trained students, though, appear to consider the rationales independently.

The training program imparted a greater sense of moralism and, to add insult to injury, led to a retrogression in the complexity of reasoning about the integration of decision elements. If the goal of moral education is to mature both the reasoning process, and the elements weighted most highly, without directing students toward specific choices, something went wrong. I think there are two potential problems in such programs. First, they make use of morally toned material during discussion. This causes students to discuss moral values in dilemma situations, leading to a polarization of students' responses towards the more predominant tendency (the more moralistic choice) in a manner analogous to the well-know group-polarization effect (Kaplan & Miller, 1983). Second, emphasis, at least in the program studied here, is on separating the various informational elements and considering them singly, rather than on the integration process, leading to a more additive, nonconfigural combination of elements.

In working with the moral education program, I hope to make use of judgmental material with less moral relevance. In the discussion of the material, students would be led to first identify the informational

components, and then shown how to integrate them in a configural manner. For example, students could judge the suspiciousness of suspects in murder mysteries, learning to use complex rules such as culpability = motive x opportunity, or that opportunity should be given greater weight if motive is low. Evidence shows that people generally use a simple averaging rule, though they are aware of more complex rules (Kaplan, 1982) so there is room for teaching complex reasoning. Similar remarks pertain to the task of predicting achievement from ability and effort information. While a multiplicative rule seems reasonable and within reach, children (and adults) often use an averaging rule (Surber, 1981). Using non-moral tasks, students should be trainable in weighting and reasoning strategies, and in turn, this training should carry over to moral decision-making according to the notion of structural parallelism (Piaget, 1965; Tomlinson-Keasey & Keasey, 1974). But, since moral values would not be at issue in training, the shift toward more moralistic values found here should not materialize.

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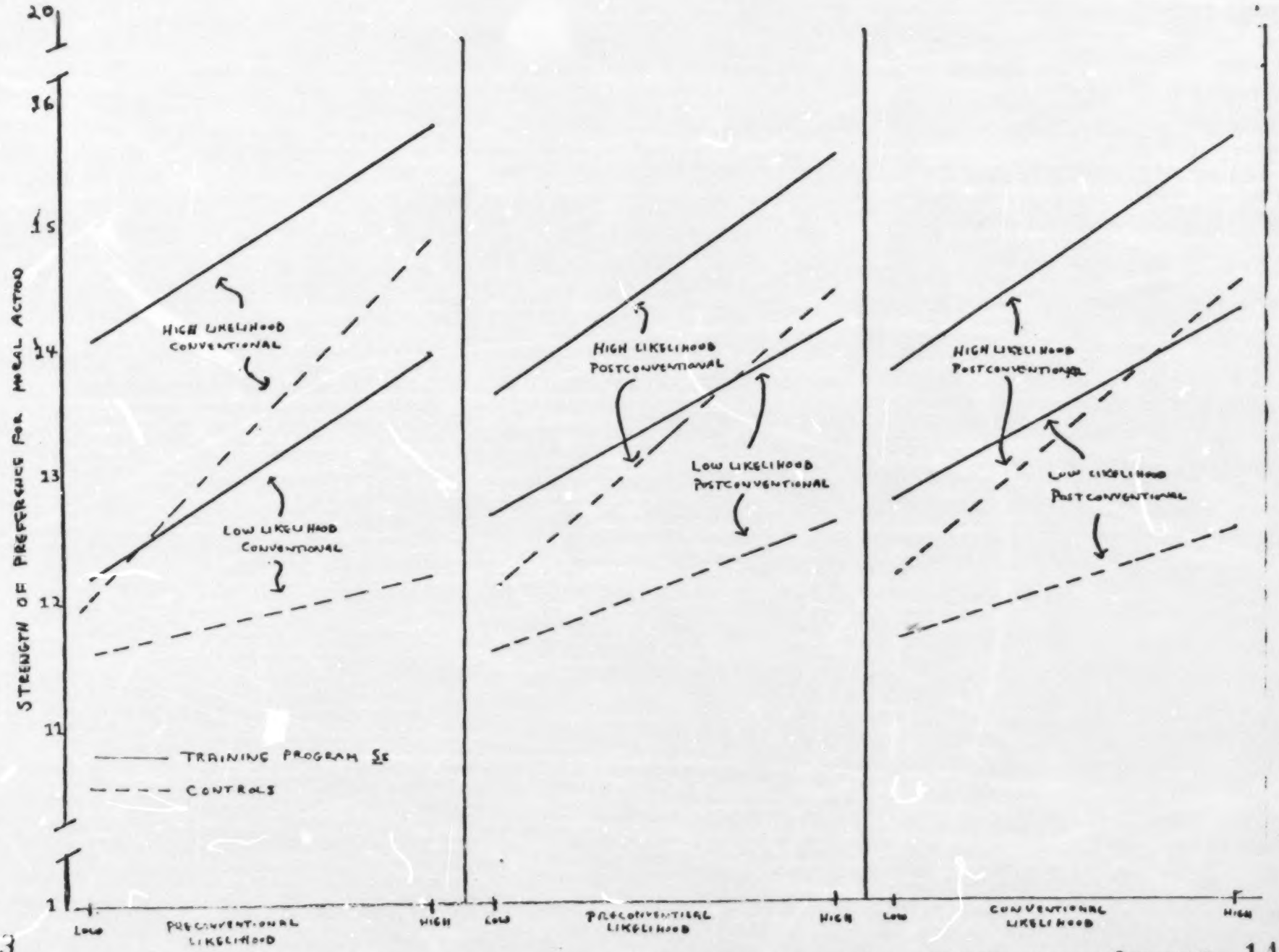

FIG. 1. MORALITY CHOICE AS A FUNCTION OF LIKELIHOOD OF PRECONVENTIONAL, CONVENTIONAL, AND POSTCONVENTIONAL RATIONALES OCCURRING: PLOTTED BY PAIRS OF RATIONALES. (HIGHER SCORES = RESPONSE TOWARD MORE MORALISTIC (NORMATIVE) CHOICE.